

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
HiLine District Field Office
1101 15th Street N.
Great Falls, MT 59401**

**Finding of No Significant Impact
HiLine District Office Oil and Gas Leasing EA
DOI-BLM-MT-M010-2012-0026-EA**

INTRODUCTION:

This signed Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the environmental analysis (DOI-BLM-M010-2012-0026-EA) for the HiLine District was available for public review and comment for 30 days beginning on June 1, 2012.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis (DOI-BLM-MT-M010-2012-0026-EA) for the HiLine District Office to analyze the potential effects from offering 4 nominated lease parcels containing approximately 1,107.13 acres of federal surveyed minerals for competitive oil and gas leasing in a sale tentatively scheduled to occur on October 23, 2012. The EA was prepared based on available information including inventory and monitoring data files.

Impact identification and analysis of the No Action Alternative and the BLM Preferred Alternative (with BLM imposed mitigation measures and deferred parcel acres) has been completed. The No Action would be to not offer for lease the 153 parcels. The BLM preferred alternative would be to offer for lease 4 lease parcels containing approximately 1,107.13 acres of federal mineral acres with lease stipulations and/or lease notices as necessary for competitive oil and gas lease sale and lease issuance. The remaining 149 parcels containing approximately 67,204.35 federal mineral acres (64,630.71 Valley; 2,573.64 Phillips) in whole or part would be deferred pending the completion of the HiLine Resource Management Plan.

One parcel is located in Phillips County. Three parcels are located in Valley County. Standard federal lease terms and conditions, as well as the stipulations identified in Appendix A of the EA, would apply. Lease stipulations (as required by Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations 3131.3) were added as necessary to each parcel as identified by the BLM to address site specific resource concerns.

It is the policy of the BLM as derived from various laws, including the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, as amended [30 U.S.C. 181 *et seq.*] and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 [43 U.S.C. 1701 *et seq.*], to make mineral resources available for disposal and to encourage development of mineral resources to meet national, regional, and local needs.

PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY:

The proposed action conforms with and is within the scope of the land use decisions described in the Phillips Management Framework Plan (MFP) (1977), and the Oil & Gas Environmental Assessment of BLM Leasing Program – Lewistown District September 1981. Although the Judith-Valley-Phillips (JVP) Resource Management Plan (RMP), as amended, was approved in 1994, it did not make decisions relative to leasing of fluid minerals due to a protest on the 1992 Final RMP that called for a supplemental EIS to address an alternative that would avoid oil and gas leasing in areas with valuable wildlife habitat.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI):

Based on my review of the EA and all other available information, I have determined that the proposal, including the implementation of required stipulations, is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. Therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required. Any future proposed development on such parcels would be subject to additional site-specific NEPA analysis and documentation.

With regard to the issue of impacts to global climate change (GCC) and/or levels of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that may contribute to GCC, as discussed in the EA, the current state of the science does not allow determinations to be made about the specific effects of specific actions. Therefore, while I find that the proposed action would result in no significant impacts, either individually or cumulatively, as described in more detail below in the FONSI, no similar finding is made with respect to GCC or GHG emissions. However, given the state of the science, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not warranted, as it would not further inform my decision, or the public, with respect to the significance or lack thereof, of this proposed action as to the issue of GCC or GHG.

This determination is based on the context and intensity of the project as described:

Context:

The Action would occur within the Malta and Glasgow Field Office's boundaries. The project is a site-specific action directly involving approximately 1,107.13 acres of federal minerals administered by the BLM that by itself does not have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance. The purpose of offering parcels for competitive oil and gas leasing is to provide opportunities for private individuals or companies to explore for and develop federal oil and gas resources after receipt of necessary approvals and to sell the oil and gas in public markets. Oil and gas produced from federal leases would be in addition to oil and gas produced from private and state owned leases.

By conducting lease sales, the BLM provides for the potential increase of energy reserves for the U.S., a steady source of income, and at the same time meets the requirement identified in the Energy Policy Act, Sec. 362(2) of 2005, Federal Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act of 1987, and the Mineral Leasing Act of 1920, Sec. 17.

Intensity:

The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27 and incorporated into resources and issues considered (includes supplemental authorities Appendix 1 H-1790-1) and supplemental Instruction Memorandum, Acts, regulations and Executive Orders.

The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal:

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. Beneficial, adverse, direct, indirect and cumulative environmental impacts have been disclosed in the EA. Mitigating measures and stipulations to reduce impacts to the various resources were incorporated in the design of the proposed action. Analysis indicated no significant impacts on society as a whole, the affected region, the affected interests or the locality. The physical and biological effects are limited to the Malta and Glasgow Field Office's and adjacent land.

2. The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety. Public health and safety would not be adversely impacted. There are no known or anticipated concerns with project waste or hazardous materials.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas: Unique characteristics present within the project area are historic and cultural resources. These characteristics are not affected by the Proposed Action with the identified stipulations and mitigating measures.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial: No anticipated effects have been identified that are controversial. While the Proposed Action may be somewhat controversial to some members of the public, the Proposed Action conforms with current land use plan guidance in which these leases were allocated as open for oil and gas leasing. No anticipated effects have been identified that are controversial. As a factor for determining (within the meaning of 40 CFR section 1508.27(b) (4)) whether or not to prepare a detailed environmental impact statement, "controversy is not equated with "the existence of opposition to a use." *Northwest Environmental Defense Center v. Bonneville Power Administration*, 117 F.3d 1520, 1536 (9th Cir. 1997).

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks: There are no effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk. Sufficient information on risk is available based on information in the EA and other past actions of a similar nature.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration: This project neither establishes a precedent nor represents a decision in principle about future actions. The actions considered in the selected alternative were considered by the interdisciplinary team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

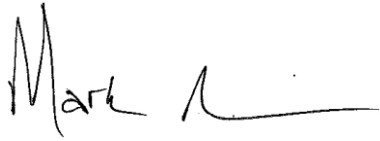
7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts – which include connected actions regardless of land ownership: The interdisciplinary team evaluated the possible actions in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions. No significant cumulative effects were identified or predicted.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources: Based on previous and ongoing cultural surveys, and through mitigation by avoidance, no adverse impacts to cultural resources were identified or anticipated. There are no features within the project area listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places that would be adversely affected by the proposed action.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, or the degree to which the action may adversely affect: 1) a proposed to be listed endangered or threatened species or its habitat, or 2) a species on BLM's sensitive species list: No adverse impacts to any threatened or endangered species or their habitat that was determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act were identified. Mitigation measures and stipulations to reduce impacts to wildlife and fisheries have been incorporated into the design of the proposed action. The deferral of 149 parcels was due to a review that found that the 149 parcels were either within or adjacent to Greater sage-grouse habitat, Sprague's pipit habitat or pallid sturgeon habitat. All three of these species are either on the Endangered Species list, proposed to be listed or are on BLM's sensitive species list.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of a federal, state, local, or tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment, whereon federal requirements are consistent with federal requirements: The proposed action does not violate any known federal, state, local or tribal law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. In addition, the project is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies and programs.

Recommended by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark K. Albers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mark K. Albers, District Manager

Date October 10, 2012

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Theresa M. Hanley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Theresa M. Hanley, Deputy State Director, Division of Resources

Date October 19, 2012